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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage June 21 on the DPP administration's determination to push for a referendum on Taiwan's UN bid under the name "Taiwan" despite the U.S. State Department's reiteration Tuesday of its opposition to such an initiative; on the 2008 presidential election; on the sharp rise of the Taiwan shares to a fresh seven-year high Wednesday; and on other local issues. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a banner headline on page four that said "Toughly Opposing the Referendum, the United States Refuses to Reiterate Its Six Assurances to Taiwan."

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said "the consequence of the United States' responding to or acting in line with China's pressure over Taiwan will make it fall exactly into the trap carefully set by China." An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," on the other hand, pointed out some subtle but noteworthy differences between the proposed referendum this time and the one held in 2004. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" commented on U.S.-Taiwan relations and said, "Taiwan appreciates and is grateful for the US' friendship. But at times, the US also has to know what being a friend means, and when to respect a friend's point of view." End summary.

A) "The United States Has Fallen into China's Trap?"

Luo Chih-cheng, associate professor of political science at Soochow University, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 500,000] (6/21):

"... It is imaginable that Washington's opposition [to Taiwan's UN bid] was a result caused forcibly by Beijing's backlashes and pressure, so it went beyond its duties to impose pressure on Taiwan.

In fact, it is widely rumored in Beijing that the shortest route from Beijing to Taipei is through Washington. But we must point out that the consequence of the United States' responding to or acting in line with China's pressure over Taiwan will make it fall exactly into the trap carefully set by China.

"If Washington succeeds in imposing pressure on Taipei, Taipei will surely hold grudges against Washington. Also, if Taiwan turns a blind eye to the U.S. opposition, Washington will surely be displeased [with Taipei]. It is very clear that the result of Washington's imposing pressure on Taiwan will certainly be deteriorated Taipei-Washington relations. Beijing will then become the only winner. ... The reality that Washington must encounter is that it is gradually losing the support and favorable impression of the Taiwan people toward the United States. Also, in the end, it will have to face a crueler question: namely, 'who lost Taiwan?'"

B) "This Time Bundling a Referendum with the Presidential Election is Rather Different"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (6/21):

"... Anyone with a clear mind can tell that the situation this time is slightly different from the previous ones. First, Washington's reaction came more quickly than before and its expression was clearer than before. It no longer reiterated the 'Four Nos and One Without' pledge; instead, it clearly indicated its 'opposition' and requested in public that Bian 'abandon' his initiative. Second, the Blue camp's reaction was also totally different from before. Not only did it no longer customarily criticize the Green camp, but KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, to everyone's surprise, also expressed strong disagreement to the U.S. statement. He even took a stand and indicated his clear support for any proposal 'that is conducive for Taiwan and meets Taiwan's efforts to join the UN with dignity.' In other words, in the face of President Chen's move this time, Washington has intensified its criticism, while the Blue camp's attack against Chen has weakened. Such subtle changes are worth observation. ...

"The subtlety lies in the fact that there is no turning back for the Green camp's referendum on 'Taiwan's UN bid under the name Taiwan.' But the U.S. reaction is unusually strong because if the Green camp succeeds in getting through this strategic pass, it will mean the total collapse of the 'Four Nos and One Without' pledge. As a result, there is no way that Washington will make any concession [over this issue]. But other than imposing some light penalties in terms of [its] diplomatic treatment [to Taiwan], what else is Washington capable of doing? ...

"The Blue camp used to play a certain subtle role of leverage during this sort of standoff, so that both the Green camp and the United States can have elbow room to make some efforts. But the Blue camp has obviously learned its lesson this time. It chose to stand on

the opposite side of the United States and at the same time maintain a certain distance from the Green camp. ..."

C) "When Being Bad Isn't Bad"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/21):

"'We don't always have to be well-behaved. Sometimes we must be bad,' National Security Council Secretary-General Mark Chen said in March when the US expressed opposition to President Chen Shui-bian's call for a new constitution. The US has faulted Taiwan's behavior again. One day after President Chen proposed that a referendum on the nation's bid to join the UN under the name 'Taiwan' be held simultaneously with next year's presidential election, the US State Department said it was opposed to the proposal and urged the president to drop it. Back in March, Mark Chen also said: 'We must sometimes say 'no' to the United States.'

"Indeed. Before anyone in the US State Department again points to Taiwan as being a 'troublemaker,' it is worth contemplating whether being bad is really bad. If bad means Taiwan exercising its democratic rights and letting the voice of its people be heard, then, yes, let Taiwan be bad in the eyes of the US State Department.

Taiwan is an independent state with its own government, a freely elected head of state and representatives, its own currency and national territory. It need not be told by the US -- nor anyone else for that matter -- what it can or cannot do. The Taiwanese government is answerable only to Taiwanese -- not the US, China or anybody else who does not have the right to vote in Taiwan. ...

"Enough is enough. Taiwan needs to step out and start making some noise to grab the world's attention. Doing so exercises the universal right to self-determination that is a hallmark of democracy. ... What is there to fear in having the people of Taiwan raise their collective voice and make themselves heard? ... Taiwan appreciates and is grateful for the US' friendship. But at times, the US also has to know what being a friend means, and when to respect a friend's point of view."

YOUNG